

# India's Womanhood

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in India*

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India has been pre-eminently the land of the deified custom. Her eager eyes have been turned toward the past and upon her favorite altars was inscribed her watch-word "To the ancient gods of my fathers." But she has now joined the rest of the world in eager quest after the new, the untried, the alluring future. Her bark has left its ancient mooring and has entered the troubled current of modern life and ambition.

Not long ago Matthew Arnold wrote of India:

"The East bowed down beneath the blast  
In patient, deep disdain;  
It let the legions thunder past,  
And plunged in thought again."

These sentiments of the English poet are now reminiscent of antiquity. The "East" is now pushing forward, and is expressing with Germany its ambition "to find a place in the sun." In other words, progress is now inscribed upon her new banner. In nothing is India's changed condition more marked than in its attitude towards its women. Its many tongued proverbs abundantly reflect its former deep rooted distrust and contempt of, and cruel injustice towards its womanhood.

"What is the chief gate to hell?—Woman."

"A man is a fool who considers his wife as his friend."

"To educate a woman is like putting a knife in the hands of a monkey."

These proverbs are expressive not of the inferiority of



BEYOND THE HOME NO SPHERE OF OPPORTUNITY  
WAS OPEN TO HER

the woman, but of the contemptible mind of the man of India. As a matter of principle and policy, woman has been kept in grossest ignorance. The knowledge of the most sacred religious books of her faith was denied her. She was deprived of all the blessings of education with its broadening and elevating influence. Only seven in one thousand women, even today, are able to read and write. The duties of maternity were thrust upon her in early girlhood years before she was prepared for them physically or mentally. She was compelled prematurely to enter upon the duty and responsibility of home making. Beyond the home no sphere of culture, of influence, or of opportunity was offered or permitted to her.

Above all she has been cursed, even in earliest infancy, with matrimony and widowhood. Some children are conditionally married to each other even before they are born! A Hindu father is enjoined by his faith to marry all his daughters before they attain puberty. As a consequence of this there are now in India 100,000 child widows—beautiful, innocent girls whose life is cursed by this cruel inhuman custom.

In view of this is it strange that some years ago in a community of 30,000 Rajputs, in North India, not one girl was to be found?

In a small village school which I conducted, there were three little girls in the infant class, aged seven, eight and nine respectively. All were Brahmans and were married, and one was a widow. One of the theological students whom I graduated from the Theological Seminary three years ago was married to a beautiful, young wife, who was well educated, and deeply pious and bright in the joy of her Christian faith and its service. But she, when she was two years old, and a sister one year older, were married the same day to an old uncle. It was, their parents thought, the only hope of marrying both of them.

The uncle husband died a year later, and the two infant wives became widows! This younger sister was picked up as an outcaste by one of our missionary ladies, was educated in her boarding school, became a Christian, and was as a young woman married to the young man, my student, who himself was a convert from heathenism. His mother, who still remains a Hindu, never ceases mourning that her boy should have married "a widow;" and is not "her present continued childlessness," she says, "a punishment to both for so unnatural a marriage!"

When the securing of a husband for her child daughter is so difficult and often impossible, many a mother has even dedicated her infant, at its birth, to become a "wife of one of the gods," which is Hindu euphemism for prostitution. Many thousands of these more than unfortunate women are, in the name and by the command of their religion, a curse of, and a curse to, that faith and people.

This is the blighted and the doomed womanhood of India—blighted by ancient, false religious conceptions, and doomed to the perpetual bondage of a cursed custom and limitation.

It is almost a miracle that the woman of that country has not, under such cruel limitations, become absolutely debased and unworthy. But she has not. She has maintained her virtue and integrity and the sweetness of her womanly nature to a wonderful degree. She is the great redeeming feature of that country and people. In her ignorance and limited sphere she has learned contentment; she even loves the fetters of her bondage.

Is she not welcome at her birth? She soon wins by her smiles and winsome ways a large place in the parental heart and becomes the pet of the home. Her ignorance and the myriad follies and superstitions of her narrow life are atoned for by her cheery prattle and pretty per-



sonal charms. Though she is bound to the narrow sphere of her home, yet she has built her throne upon the hearth and rules husband and children with an iron rod. There is no mother on earth who shapes and gives her impress to the children in the home atmosphere as she does. If, in her religious training and hopes, her destiny is linked to and depends upon man, she sees to it that upon father, husband and son her religious influence shall be great, if not supreme. By her religious sincerity, her sweet, simple, boundless devotion to her ancestral faith and gods, she is today by far the greatest known force for the preservation of that religion. Hinduism would vanish in a day were it not for the remarkable religious devotion and sincerity of the woman of India.

Nor should it be supposed that she greatly feels the cruelty and bitterness of her life limitations. Like the prisoner of Chillon she has become reconciled to her condition even if she does not love her chains. No one is a greater obstacle than she to efforts now put forth for her freedom and exaltation. She has even glorified her bondage and was distinctly unfriendly to her would be emancipators.

Nor must it be thought that all the educated men of India welcome the campaign for the greater rights and privileges of their women. Even such a man as Rabindranath Tagore resents the Western propaganda in behalf of the woman of India and suggests that they might be better employed in the work of directing and properly locating and restraining their own women of the West. Doubtless much of this feeling arises from the radical differences which exist in the minds of the East and of the West as to the true sphere and rights of woman. Still, many of the best men of India are now agreed that the prosperity of their native land must depend more than ever upon the emancipation of their women from the many



THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY OF PROMISE.

physical, social, intellectual and religious disabilities which have cursed that country.

But today we behold, for her, the dawn of the new day of promise, of blessing, and of power.

A couple of years ago I stood upon one of the spurs of the great Himalyan range waiting for the dawn of the day. The spur was only 8,500 feet high. I eagerly faced the east awaiting the sunrise; but the sun had not yet risen above the horizon. While thus waiting for the new day, I turned and looked behind me, and saw, forty miles in the distance, the wonderful Kinchenjunga range which towers nearly 20,000 feet above the spur on which we were then standing, and was robed in a beautiful white garb of eternal snow. To my surprise I saw that the sun had already arisen and was pouring its golden rays upon that range, and was transmuting it into a vision of beauty and splendor. A hundred miles away and to the left of this we could also see the sun-tipped cap of Mt. Everest, the highest mountain peak on earth. It also was bathed in the glorious sun-lit dawn. Presently for us too the sun ascended above the horizon and we welcomed the initial glory and splendor of a new day. And this was the harbinger of the new day for all the plains and valleys of India which just then were still resting in the gloom of night.

This to me was a parable of the dawn of a new day of opportunity and of blessing for the womanhood of India. The sun is shining already upon the highest peaks of opportunity in that land, and the millions of that land, who are in the valleys of darkness, of ignorance, and superstition are soon to be bathed in the sunlight of God's own day of blessing.

It is really the dawn of the Christian Sun of Righteousness who is rising with healing in his wings for the women of India. It is Christianity and Christ which are bring-

ing to the women of that land this new era of blessing and of power. During the last century the Christian propaganda has furnished to India the supreme dynamic as also the method of the new movements towards woman's emancipation and glorious opportunity. And of all these Christian influences none compares in effectiveness to the example and heroic labors of the missionary women of the West who, with so much of devotion and love, are offering all their gifts of faith, of culture, and of service upon the altar of the redemption of India's womanhood. Three thousand and two hundred of these noble women of the Protestant West, (not to speak of the no less devoted Roman Catholic nuns) are today, by their life and example, furnishing new ideals and a mighty impulse to their Indian sisters, and showing to them the wonderful possibilities of power which lie before them. They throw a divine halo around the home and reveal the ever widening sphere of womanly service and loving sacrifice for others.

What are some of the results of this Christian propaganda for the women of that land? In the first place they are receiving the vision of a new sphere of life and opportunity. It is no longer necessary that woman should find her influence confined to the home—an influence too of ignorance and of ultra conservatism. There is today placed before her a new and a wondrous opportunity of domestic, social, cultural, and religious privilege in behalf of her people.

Then the supreme worth of womanhood has been revealed for the first time in that land. The people of India are learning today, for the first time, that the position of woman in the life of any country is the truest barometer of that country's position in the great life of the world. They are learning today that woman is, after all, worthy of the highest education. There is a great movement



GIRLS OF WEST STREET SCHOOL, PALANI.

There is a great movement toward the school-house for the girls of India.

toward the school house for the girls of India. One million of them are already members of the school population. The school roll of these girls was increased by 100,000 last year. There are ten colleges for women in India, three of which are Christian, and in all of which more than one-third of the students are Christian women.

It must be remembered that the education of women in India was initiated by and is largely the result of the Protestant missionary effort; and it is but natural that the Christian women of India should shine more than others in this realm of opportunity and development. Through the efforts of these Christian women, almost the only women teachers now available for Hindu girls' schools are Christians. In the Madras Presidency one-fifth of all school girls are Christians. One-tenth of all the reading women of India are Christians. Out of twenty thousand Indian women who understand English in that Presidency, 18,200 are Christian, only one a Jain, 70 Mohammedan, and 1,700 Hindu! Think of the marvelous sweep of influence which this means for the women of India, and especially for the Christian women of that land!

There is also a new era of service now opening to women. There are ten thousand Indian Protestant women, many of them of splendid educational equipment, and all of deep, earnest piety, who are giving their whole time to the missionary propaganda in connection with the Protestant Church. Many of these women are the peers of any of their sisters in any other land, both in equipment of knowledge, and of faith and power. The idea that woman can serve in any other than a menial capacity is thus taught to India for the first time by the example of these Christian women; and their influence is reaching all over the country and among the people of other faiths too. In Bombay there was established recently a new



MANY PROTESTANT WOMEN ARE GIVING THEIR TIME  
TO CHRISTIAN WORK.



institution called Seva Sadan, whose purpose is to train Indian women of any and of all faiths for honorable service among their sisters. This idea of high service by woman is Christian; but it is entering into the very fabric and life of other faiths too.

Above all else, I have been inspired by the wonderful progress, made during my 36 years' experience in India, in the development of the life and the opportunities of the Christian women of that land. In every mission there is found today a body of excellently trained and well equipped Christian women who reveal the highest types and noblest characteristics of our faith, and who are wielding an influence far beyond anything that we realize in the progress of the Kingdom of God in India; and I think far beyond what the men of that country are wielding at the present time. There is a growing body of distinguished Christian women who are reflecting a glory upon the womanhood of that land, and who, by their example and activities, are not only revealing the possibilities but the marvelous powers of a consecrated Indian womanhood.

Consider a few of them only.

Miss Lilavati Singh, the educator, was a member of the outcaste community, but beautified by the transcendent graces of our religion, and adorned with a university culture which gave her a wonderful charm of personality. It was of this lady that Ex-President Harrison remarked, as he presided at the Ecumenical Conference fifteen years ago at New York City, "Ladies and gentlemen, if I had had a million dollars, and had expended all of it on Missions, and if the only result of my investment had been this lady I would have regarded my investment as having been well made."

Pundita Ramabai is a remarkable philanthropist. She was a discouraged Brahman widow when God's Spirit touched her heart, years ago; and she became a Christian



—verily a centre of power. With wonderful ability and devotion she has given herself to the redemption of her benighted little widowed sisters of India. In her great institution, where nearly 3,000 of these youth are being trained for life and service, Ramabai has done far more for the upbuilding of truth and righteousness, of love and service, than has any man that I know of in that land.

Or look at Mrs. Sattianathan, editor, (the widow of Dr. Sattianathan), who is conducting the most beautiful magazine in all India, one devoted to Indian womanhood. She is a lady of peculiar charm of personality and of the graces of life.

Behold also Miss Bose, the doctor. She was one of the distinguished members of the National Missionary Council of India three years ago, and, with wonderful ability presented, in that great Council, the cause of India's womanhood, and revealed her own exquisite power as an example of what the women of India may become and achieve.

Or consider Miss Cornelia Sorabjee, the lawyer. This lady is the first distinguished woman lawyer in that country. Wonderfully able and devoted, through her profession, to the higher interests of the women of India, she is wielding a unique power today.

Miss Goreh, the poet, also is a striking personality. She died even while very young, and yet she left as a legacy to the Christian Church a beautiful hymn, the only hymn of an Indian Christian which had found currency in this country,—“In the secret of His Presence, How my soul delights to hide.”

As I think of these splendid trophies which Christianity has won in India, and of other women who are representative of the glory and power of our faith in that land, I am impelled to exclaim in ancient words: “Who are these who are arrayed in white robes? These are they

who have come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." These are the crown, the brightest and richest crown, of Christian Missions in that land ; and I know of no Indian Christian men who would present so distinguished and brilliant a body as that of these noble Christian women. They are worthy to stand beside the best of our 1200 American missionary women now working in that country.



